

22
WITTENHAM-HILL,

A

P O E M.

By
Mr Pentycroft.



L O N D O N :

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Wallingford.

MDCCLXXVI.

ATTENHANT

1000

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WITTENHAM-HILL *is a beautiful Eminence in the Center
of the Oxfordshire and Berkshire Hills, rising in the
Estate of Sir Henry Oxenden, Bart. near Dorchester-
Bridge, in Berks.*

WITNESSES: HILL is a competent person to the Court
of the Oxfordshire and Berkshire Roads being in the
County of the County of Oxford and the County of
Berkshire, in Berkshire.

WITTENHAM-HILL.

'TIS inspiration all the fancy fills,
Around thy throne, O! *Wit'nam*, queen of hills.
Thy mingled woods, mounts, turrets, vales and streams,
With long-lost visions deck the poet's dreams.
Paint other things than * *Faringdon's* fam'd scite,
Her † beds of heroes or her fields of fight.
Thou saw'st, and never can the muse forget,
Thou saw'st, when all was midmost heathen jet,

* Alluding to *Faringdon-hill*, a beautiful and pathetic Poem, supposed to be written by Mr. *Pyre*, of *Faringdon*.

† Alfred was born at *Faringdon*, and many battles of the Saxons and Danes were fought near that place.

With twilight rays from half-illumin'd *Rome*,
 Thou saw'st † *Birinus*, good *Birinus* come.
 How did he like another SAVIOUR stand,
 And bless with arms uprais'd the list'ning land !
 The west's fierce SAXONS hear aghast the sound,
 Raise their new eyes to heaven and fall around.
 The altars shudder, and the broad oaks bow :
 Down drops, self-loof'd, the mystic misseltoe.
 In stoles of snow no priests can now adore,
 The * steers can smoke, the steeds can neigh no more.
 A cross but *seen*, th' † unchissel'd colonade
 Of idol orgies shrinks away afraid.

† *Birinus*, being sent from Rome by Pope Gregory to convert the West-Saxons, first preached the gospel to them on Birin's-hill, so called to this day from that circumstance. The spot is not far from Wittenham-hill. Here *Kingils*, who was then King of the West-Saxons, was, by *Birinus*, converted, with all his kingdom, to Christianity. *Dorchester Church*, or rather Cathedral, was built hereupon, and *Birinus* made Bishop of it ; and, probably, the first transaction performed in it was that of baptizing the King ; when *Oswald*, King of the Mercians, presented him at the font, and stood god-father to him in person.

* Auspices were drawn from the smoke of white oxen, and from the neighing of white horses.

† The touch of any tool would have polluted the stones designed for a Druidical Temple. That Temple consisting only of columns placed in a neatly circular form, without any covering, is here called a Colonade.

A *cross* display'd, in *Kingil's* royal eye,
 The gathering gems of moist repentance lie.
 There awful rose *Dorchester's* long-drawn fane,
 And wav'd a mitre to the willing plain.
 There, with baptismal dew to bathe his brow,
 I see, I see a weeping monarch go.
 And there, an haughty sponfor, at his side
 Stalks mighty *Oswald*, *Mercia's* princely pride.
 The rites now opening in the dread abode,
 He owns no * *Belin*, yellow-tressy god :
 Him only hails, who heals the pallid *mind*,
His healer, and the healer of mankind.

Barbarity her griffin wings uncouth
 Flapp'd hideous, at the thrilling power of truth.
 † Sudden the arts and human manners came,
 And language with her tongues of cloven flame.

* I have somewhere met with an ancient British Altar with this inscription,
Βελινω τω Πανακειῷ, To *Belin*, who heals every disorder. He is here called *yellow-tressy*,
 because he was the same god with *Apollo* or the *Sun*. In reading of a fabulous god,
 called the *All-Healer*, no one can help thinking of him who is really and properly the
Physician of Souls.

† It is an observation made by the late *Dr. JORTIN*, that wherever *Christianity*
 came, it always brought with it not only truth but letters and the liberal arts.

Science

Science, sweet science, the new margin seeks,
And the loom rattles and the plough-share screeks.

Such, *Wit'nam*, such dear monuments are thine,
O! live, and in thy pomp of story shine.
While VIRTUE can but trace her pictur'd pains,
As with prone breast thy panting height she gains.
'Tis toil (she cries) that wins the giddy ascent,
Not empty wishes, ease, or accident.
And *where* they tread, and *how*, with ardent eyes
All mark who mount from nature to the skies.
To fall is easy, lubricous the way,
And, tho' unblemish'd, climb whole years we may:
Yet by one slip those pains are oft undone;
Swift we descend a *Sisyphus's* stone:
Our fame how bruish'd, how splinter'd all our peace,
That heal'd not soon, not soon cemented *this*.

O! listen to the descant sweetly-sage,
Youth with its bushy locks, and thin-hair'd age,

Point

Point me the good, the learned, or the great,
 Who wrought not early, nor yet labour'd late.
 Point me the gay, luxurious, or the vain,
 Who, without care, e'en *folly's* ends obtain;
 Alike on vice's as on virtue's plan,
 Is labour still the destiny of man.

* So, e'er the ocean's mighty store can be
 Of plants, beasts, men, the liquid treasury,
 Still must it run thro' channels without end,
 Then leave those tracts and back its footsteps bend:
 Unloit'ring then these tracts renew again,
 Then homeward travel to its former plain.

+ So labours in his golden rounds the sun,
 Now pants up-hill half-breathing to his noon,
 Now downward hastens to his setting sea,
 Nor then reclines, but hurries northerly.

* "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place from
 whence the rivers come thither they return again." ECCLESIASTES, Ch. i. V. 7.

+ "The sun ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he
 arose. Ver. 5.

C

And

‡ And so not rests the *air* : above, below,
 Without, within, its subtil volumes go.
 E'en when the lake serene no tremor feels,
 Thro' every pore of every drop it steals.
 By night on Philomela's wine-wet throat,
 By day on every wood-bird's changeful note
 It dances, active still in winter's gloom,
 And when light's longer rays the skies illumine.

* All nature labours, and e'en nature's *God* :
 Pale sloth is labour, and the worst its load.

Teach then, O! mount of pleasure and of song,
 While thy green steeps ascend the frolic throng
 This lesson, but to change their industry,
 And wisdom, virtue, heaven their lot shall be.

‡ " The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north : it
 " whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to its circuits."
 Ver. 6.

* " All things are full of labour." Ver. 8.

'Twas

† 'Twas here in fairy revel danc'd each maid,
 Guardian of hills, of streamlets or the glade ;
 The oreads tall and hamadryads brown,
 And wave-nymphs with their veils in ‡ arches thrown ;
 What time (as fablers sing) old Thames first led
 The virgin Isis to her bridal bed.
 Each muse was there, with lute, and pipe, and shell,
 And Flora deck'd with buds the wat'ry cell.

† Alluding to Michael Drayton's poetical description of the marriage of the Thames and Isis, at Dorchester Bridge, within the distance of about three furlongs from the summit of Wittenham Hill. Here I would take the liberty to observe, that Isis, the fashionable appellation of that part of the River Thames below Dorchester Bridge, was not used till within a very few centuries past, first by Poets, and afterwards injudiciously by Antiquarians, and Writers of Chorography. In the Saxon Chronicle, and in several Charters much older than the Saxon Chronicle, it appears, that all the River below as well as all above this Bridge, was known only by the name of Thames, and not by that of Isis. This last improper name, however, hath been countenanced of late in the proceedings of the supreme legislative court, and courts of justice at Westminster, and in inferior jurisdictions, and by men of learning in the neighbouring university : nor is it now unusual for the inhabitants of the adjoining tract, erroneously to correct any one who may happen to call the lower part of this river by the title of Tems or Thames, and to alledge that the true name is Isis, from its source to its conflux with the River called Tame Stream, which runs out of Buckinghamshire to Thame Town, and so up to Dorchester Bridge.

‡ The Naiads are often represented with veils behind them hanging archwise.

The tale, the place, from time's oblivious doom
The peasants keep, and point the † willowy room.

What means (O! for a *Walpole's* antique skill!)
What means the milk-white ‡ cross on yonder hill?
Say, corresponds it with the milk-white steed,
Where *Alfred* pranc'd in * *Battlekin's* proud mead?
And teaches, like the airy-floating sign
Seen by the thousand troops of *Constantine*,
That numbers, counsel, valor, all are vain,
Save where th' Almighty leads the hostile train?

§ No race the swift can claim, no spoils the strong,
Events to God's high providence belong.

O! my own *Wallingford's* || domestic bower,
Where heaven's best dews distill on yon grey tower,

† To one who observes the spot, the *willowy-room* will seem picturesque.

‡ A large white cross cut in a hill a few miles beyond Watlington.

* Battlekin, or Baukin, near Faringdon.

§ "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." HOLY SCRIPTURE.

|| Wallingford, in several points of view, looks like a little city rising out of a bower.

I love

I love thee, love thy * mould'ring fragments pale,
 And bid thy scenes so hospitable, hail !
 Here in thy shade full many a worthy name
 Breathes and adorns the lists of private fame.
 And here in elder time within thy mead
 Plain † *Chaucer* tun'd to novel verse the reed.
 'Twas in thy walls ‡ *Matilda's* fault'ring feet,
 Unus'd to travel, found a calm retreat.
 Five long-full miles she ran, the centry's fight
 Midst woolly snows eluding, clad in white.
 O'er frozen streams and pits of ice she came,
 By night, (hard fortune for so high a dame)
 And, breathless while she urg'd her aching pace,
 Winter's sharp morsels beat her royal face.

* The small remain of the old Castle, is a white hanging ruin, extremely thick, with a window (probably that of the Chapel) now filled up.

† Chaucer, the old English poet, was Constable of Wallingford Castle, near which place, at Ewelme, he and his wife lie buried.

‡ Queen Matilda, vulgarly called Maud, being straitly besieged in Oxford, fled thence in white garments under favor of a snow-scene. The weather, on the night of her escape, was very stormy, and beat in her face all the way as she ran over the frozen ditches and river by night to Abingdon. At that place she took horse, and coming to Wallingford was, by its garrison, joyfully received and defended.

* Here, suppliant at the Norman's conq'ring feet,
 Crouch'd *Stigand*, and high peers the monarch greet.
 How nobly o'er the stream those arches bend,
 And far their sweep of hoary length extend.
 Here, parted by the intervening flood,
 Usurping *Stephen* on one margin stood ;
 Th' opposing bank the rival *Henry* bore,
 And peaceful parleys sooth'd the list'ning shore.
 Who could have thought, the princely foes t' have seen,
 Black rancour bleach'd to friendship wou'd have been ?
 Who could have hop'd a *Stephen's* breast of stone
 Would love, and seat an *Henry* on his throne ?
 Who have believ'd an *Henry's* heart of steel
 Would melt, and all the son's soft duty feel ?

* It was at Wallingford that William the Conqueror was first acknowledged King of England by *Stigand*, Archbishop of Canterbury, and other Nobles. Here also, after a long and fierce war, King Stephen and Prince Henry at last agreed to a parley, one standing on one side of the river, and the other on the other, to settle preliminaries of peace. It is one of the most moving pictures in all History, to see, on this occasion, two such bloody enemies as Stephen and Henry, commencing friends; and not only Stephen disinheriting his son Eustace, from the throne, in Henry's favour, but Henry ever afterwards behaving, like another Eustace, with all the affection and duty of a son to Stephen.

Well

* Well is the gentle day of whitest note
 By rustic hinds to village-mirth devote.
 For longer than old *Troy* was girt by *Greece*,
 Had *Wallingford* ne'er known an hour of peace.
 Eleven sad years these hardy walls around
 The siegers sat, and drench'd with gore the ground.

Be *Concord* ours! what † mildness in her mien,
 Her brows are curl'd with laurel ever-green,
 Her hands two twisted horns of plenty bear,
 O! *Concord*, be this isle thy darling care!
 ‡ Foul is that fiend who makes th' Atlantic mourn,
 Known by her dress, *a robe in pieces torn*.
 Let power be gentle, mindful of its end,
 Not its own pomp, but subjects to defend:

* *Query*. Whether, in memory of this famous peace, *Crowmarsh Fair*, on St. Mary Magdalen's day, was not instituted?

† *Concord* is distinguished among the ancients by the mildness of her countenance, and a crown of laurel; and, on a gem of Gordianus Junior (See Mountfaucon) by a cornucopia in each of her hands, to signify the mutual advantages to either party under her influence.

‡ *Discord* is described by VIRGIL, "*scissâ gaudens discordia pallâ*."

And

And the just sceptre's amiable sway,
Let subjects deem it freedom to obey.

So *Wit'nam* swells, in *Oxenden's* fair field,
Its own green glory, and the vallies shield:
The vallies, with their many-winding flood,
And happy fields that wave with golden food,
Repine not; at its foot delight to be,
And love their *Wit'nam's* verdant majesty.

T H E E N D.

